

Town Meeting Coordinating Committee
Subcommittee on Policies and Procedures

August 23, 2016

REVISED DRAFT MINUTES

Present: Chris Riddle, Chair; Jacqueline Maidana, Vice-Chair, Michael Greenebaum, Clerk; Maurianne Adams, John Hornik, Amber KaCey, Janet McGowan, Adrienne Terrizzi

Absent: None

Guests: Jim Pistrang (Town Moderator), John Fox

Agenda

1. Review and approve August 9, 2016, minutes
2. Membership
3. Visit by the Moderator, Jim Pistrang
4. Town Meeting: What works well and what doesn't. Attempt to isolate a small set of improvement projects.
5. Topics not anticipated 48 hours before meeting
6. Public Comment

The meeting was called to order by Chair Riddle at 4:35. The agenda was reviewed. Minutes of August 9 were reviewed and the format discussed. Draft minutes should be distributed to subcommittee as soon as possible. Then, when approved, sent to Mary Streeter for posting on the TMCC website. The value of the 1997 Town Meeting Study Committee of October 1997 will be added to the minutes. Terrizzi moved to accept, with thanks to John Hornik for taking them. APPROVED

New members were discussed. We will stay at nine members. Hind Mari has accepted an invitation to join the Subcommittee.

Discussion with the Town Moderator

Town Moderator Jim Pistrang joined the discussion to discuss improvements to town meeting. He doesn't think that town meeting needs a lot of remedies. He does not agree with term limits. Possibly a PR campaign to encourage people to run, and to explain town meeting to the community. He understands some positives to a smaller town meeting - i.e. more races - but it is a flawed argument. Currently election to town meeting is a kind of self-selecting process, and that is a good thing. It is good that people enter without fixed positions.

Adams: more can be done with precinct meetings prior to elections. Candidates Night can be held precinct by precinct.

McGowan: loves the debate on the floor of town meeting.

Terrizzi: Is there polarization and anger? Pistrang: Not sure that there is.

Adams: Perhaps there could be four town meetings: Budget, Capital Spending, Zoning, Citizen Petitions. Pistrang: More frequent meetings is a flawed concept; another town meeting each year is not really possible. Adams: believes in separation of powers, and town meeting should become a strong legislature. Favors town meeting committees to vet as US Congress does. Pistrang: likes separation of powers but does not think town meeting should be involved with such committees. Greenebaum: the idea of town meeting committees should be discussed at a separate meeting to be given due consideration. Pistrang: already hard to find appointees to committees that work so hard.

Fox: Zoning articles should be sent to town meeting earlier to give an opportunity to understand them.. Pistrang: Zoning amendments and motions from the floor are confusing. Greenebaum: Vote the following session on motions on the floor. Pistrang: troubled by the tendency to push motions down the calendar. Maidana: At times, amendments from the floor are useful.. McGowan: Restrict zoning articles to fall town meeting.

Hornik: Town meeting does not act enough like a legislative body. It should create legislative committees to vet articles in advance. There should be a Zoning Committee, like a Finance Committee, a committee of town meeting. Pistrang: disagrees; different parts of government must have different roles and town meeting should not impinge on Select Board. Likes the separation of powers.

Discussion of different ways of running precinct meetings - both inform and debate.

While the Warrant Review sessions are informative, Terrizzi wants the precinct meetings to debate pros and cons.

McGowan: spring town meeting's length is so difficult, especially for families with children.

Pistrang: suggested the possibility that after 40 minutes (or some other period of time) the moderator calls the question and if supported by two-thirds of town meeting ends discussion.

Fox: urged SPP to create recommendations with those not sure about town meeting in mind.

Greenebaum: Ex officio members should not vote. Terrizzi and Maidana: why do officials not have to answer questions? Pistrang: town meeting is not a court; town officials cannot be required to answer questions.

KaCey: likes the idea of dedicated meetings for zoning. Hornik: Legislative Committees need not be many but could be important in providing greater diversity of opinion.

McGowan: 7th inning stretch? Moderator: will happen in the fall.

McGowan More precincts? Fewer precincts?

SPP thanked Pistrang for participating in this discussion and sharing his ideas..

Next Steps

Riddle: Pick 5-10 strategies to develop without regard to Charter Commission.

Brainstormed Ideas (taken from McGowan's list)

Consider the Brookline option (no motions or amendments from the floor) for zoning

Automatic motion for previous question after 40 minutes.

Red and Green cards and add Question cards

Legislative Committees: Finance and Zoning

Improve how information comes to town meeting

Public education

Data about critical town meeting votes over the past years; how often has it supported town positions?

Defer votes on motions from the floor until next session

Zoning articles in the fall

Smaller town meeting

No voting by ex officio members

End at 9:30

Increase in number of signatures required for citizen petitions

Next Meeting on September 6 at 4:30-6:30 in the Lower Meeting Room: Review 1997 report and its recommendations - what's been done, whether what hasn't been done should be done, what else should be done?

Meeting adjourned at 6:26

Michael Greenebaum, Clerk